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C O N F I D E N T I A L VATICAN 003197

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [PHUM](#) [IZ](#) [VT](#)

SUBJECT: HOLY SEE CLARIFIES POSITION ON NAJAF MEDIATION

REF: LEVIN-HARDT 8/17 E-MAIL

Classified By: Charge d'affaires, D. Brent Hardt. Reasons: 1.5 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: The Holy See's Acting Foreign Minister Pietro Parolin told Charge August 18 that the Holy See would be willing to help mediate the standoff in Najaf if all parties to the conflict requested it, but had indicated this willingness only in response to a public request made by an al-Sadr "spokesman." Charge outlined the U.S. view (reftel) that al-Sadr's proposal was merely a delaying tactic, and did not reflect a good faith desire to resolve the impasse. Charge also emphasized that resolution of the conflict was the responsibility of the Interim Iraqi Government (IIG), which was best placed to determine the way forward. Parolin noted that the Holy See had come under intense pressure from the media late August 15 to respond to the al-Sadr "proposal" and had issued their standard statement of Holy See willingness to provide good offices when all parties to a conflict request such support. End Summary.

2. (C) During an August 18 call on Acting FM-equivalent Monsignor Pietro Parolin, Charge solicited clarification of recent press reports of Vatican willingness to help mediate a resolution to the current standoff in Najaf. Parolin responded that the Holy See was eager to hear what the U.S. thought of the idea, which had first been floated August 15 by al-Sadr "spokesman" Ahmad al-Shaybani. Drawing from refrel, Charge said the proposal did not appear genuine. Al-Sadr was playing for time and playing to the media, but did not appear to be seriously interested in resolving the standoff. Moreover, his broader agenda -- to disrupt progress toward democracy and move towards a theocratic state infused with a radical Shi'a outlook -- was contrary to U.S. and Holy See goals for Iraq.

3. (C) Parolin expressed appreciation for the U.S. perspective, noting that since this issue first came to their attention, the Holy See had not had any input on the coalition attitude toward such mediation. He said that Cardinal Sodano had told him that the media was "persecuting" him for a response on the plane back from the Pope's trip to Lourdes, which had prompted the Secretary of State to issue his first statement on the matter to the effect that "if requested, the Pope will allow this mediation." He elaborated further, noting that the "whole endeavor of the Pope and the Holy See is an endeavor of mediation," and that he could envisage a "good offices" mediation aimed at encouraging concerned parties to talk. Sodano had also condemned ongoing killings in Najaf as "a dishonor for Islam" and appealed for respect for the sacred character of the city.

4. (C) Following continued media speculation, Parolin said the Vatican press office issued a further clarification August 17 in which it stressed the general nature of the Vatican offer, since the Vatican had never actually received any formal request for mediation. The Vatican spokesman explained that "the Holy See is always ready to help the parties so they can talk and dialogue, on the condition that there really is a will to undertake peaceful ways for the solution of conflicts." CDA noted that the recent statements from the al-Sadr spokesman, which attempted to portray the mediation as a Papal initiative -- and not something Al-Sadr had first raised -- offered further confirmation that the proposal was not intended to be taken seriously.

5. (C) Parolin indicated that should there ever be interest in Vatican mediation, their Nuncio in Baghdad, Fernando Filoni, would likely undertake such an effort. At the same time, the Holy See would be willing to send a special envoy if the occasion should ever arise. He said the Nuncio personally had no further details on the alleged al-Sadr proposal. The Nuncio had observed publicly that it would be "useless to make predictions until (al-Sadr) clarifies his real intentions." Parolin said he understood that the disarmament of al-Sadr's forces remained the sticking point in any durable political solution to the standoff.

6. (C) Parolin did express the Holy See's mounting concern about the flight of Christians from Iraq in the wake of the recent bombings of Christian churches. The Vatican has heard that 40,000 Christians had fled since the attacks, primarily

to Syria and Jordan, compounding an exodus that had begun in the wake of the war. Despite the Chaldean community's deep historic roots in Iraq, Christians were becoming identified with the West and with the military presence.

17. (C) Parolin queried whether the U.S. had concerns about Iran's role in the Najaf uprising, and said the Holy See would be interested in hearing if there were firm indications

of Iranian involvement. Parolin also asked about the UN's role, and when it would step forward to play a greater role. Charge conveyed a copy of USAID's recent summary of progress in Iraq, "A Year in Iraq," noting that despite problems there were positive developments. Parolin welcomed this information, but concluded that until the security situation improved significantly, the outlook for further progress would be bleak.

HARDT

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